

November 11, 2007

Twenty-fourth Sunday After Pentecost

“Present Reality”

Luke 20:27-40

There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection, and they asked him a question, saying, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, having a wife but no children, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children. And the second and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died. Afterward the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife.”

And Jesus said to them, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.” Then some of the scribes answered, “Teacher, you have spoken well.” For they no longer dared to ask him any question.

Sermon

For those of you who don’t know, I recently had what is called a gall bladder attack. I’m not quite sure what I did to offend my gall bladder and cause it to attack me, but it did. Luckily, Doctor Cinnater made a house call at my office while he was visiting Fall Fest here and got me some drugs. He also gave me some disturbing orders about my diet.

I’m not a doctor, but apparently one’s gall bladder has something to do with processing fat and I was no longer to make it work so hard. I was told that fried foods are now a “no no.” Pizza with all of its cheesy goodness is out of bounds. Red meat is an anathema. I thanked the doctor for being kind enough to drop by and remove all that pesky joy from my diet. As he left I shouted after him, “What about coffee?” He shot right back with a very definite “No.” It might have been kinder for him to shoot back with a handgun.

While medical science doesn’t know everything, it does know a lot, and it knows a lot about gall bladders. God created gall bladders and doctors have figured out pretty much how they work. The reality is that if I want to stay healthy, I need to adjust my diet. I’m not on the drugs anymore, but after easing up on the fats and caffeine, I got to feeling better. I need to watch what I eat. It’s that simple.

So am I doing it? Well, sort of. You see, I know how things work, but I really want my coffee. So I’m limiting myself to two cups in the morning...at least until I really want a third. And I’m cutting out fats...although I want to test the boundaries so I had a frozen pizza the other night just to make sure I can handle it. And I just couldn’t pass up a piece of fried chicken at Wednesday night Prayer and Praise.

I’m having trouble accepting this new reality of a bum gall bladder in my life. You see, I’ve built my diet and eating habits on a pre-gall bladder attack reality. Despite

the truth of a bum gall bladder, I want to stick to what I know and what I've grown comfortable with.

The fact I must work very hard to deny is that this quasi-reality I've created for myself will probably come back to bite me and Doc Cinnater will then let me know what the clinical term is for "moron."

The Sadducees in our Gospel lesson are misguided in denying the resurrection of the body, but this reading isn't so much about them as it is about Jesus' response to their query. They present this bizarre "what if" story to Christ, maybe hoping that he'll back up their theological position. He doesn't. Instead He paints a very revealing picture of what those who are considered worthy have to look forward to.

"The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."

Jesus says that such a question totally misses the gist of things. It tries to take the immensity and power and majesty of God and bend it into something that fits into an earthly understanding and personal agenda. Things that are vital to this life and humankind as we know it—marriage and procreation, even death—these things hold no standing on the other side of the resurrection. The children of God will be fundamentally changed, unable to die, being equal to angels, whatever that means.

Jesus pounds home the truth of the resurrection by recalling how God spoke to Moses, saying, "**I am** the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Although Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have been dead by the earthly definition of death for hundreds of years, God says He is yet still their God. He doesn't say "**I was** the God of Abraham." He says, "**I am** the God of Abraham." And then Jesus goes even further, making the shocking statement that as children of God, death doesn't separate us. We are all connected, already in the kingdom of God. "*Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.*"

This is the reality that we sometimes have difficulty with. We know that Jesus Christ suffered and died for our sins. We know that He paid our debt in full, purchased us back from sin, death and the power of the devil. We know that He rose to life eternal. And we know that through our baptism and the Holy Spirit we've been blessed with saving faith that receives Christ's death and resurrection as our own, and that we will rise to life eternal. What we have trouble with is grasping that this is a present reality, not a future one.

We stand holy before God through forgiveness in Christ. We stand in God's kingdom. We're already there. Our liturgy claims this truth in the Proper Preface. We say it each week so maybe we get so used to it we lose the significance. "Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying: Holy, Holy, Holy..." That's not just flowery talk. That's us stating the truth that we already stand in God's kingdom offering Him praise along with the angels and all the faithful who've passed from death to life. It's the reality, but we have a hard time with it.

Why? Because we find it a tough reality to live with. The reality is I should avoid fats, red meat and caffeine. But I desire ice cream, pizza, fried chicken and all these new Cajun foods that I'm discovering in all their delicious fattiness. So I try to deny the reality, pretend that it doesn't exist or that if it does, it doesn't really make those tough demands on my diet.

We like sin, or at least our sinful nature likes sin. The reality is that we already live as forgiven children of God in His kingdom. But because of our sinful nature, we try to push the reality away or at least modify it so we can rationalize our behavior. We may not be quite as far as the Sadducees in denying the resurrection of the dead, but we often like leaving it in the future so that it doesn't impact our desire to sin in the here and now.

How often do we catch ourselves in a sinful desire or action and kind of let ourselves off the hook by saying, "Hey, nobody's perfect." Wrong. The reality is that you've been made perfect by Christ. You stand in the kingdom of God. That's the reality. Believe it and let this truth make the demands it does on your life. Don't push it away to the realm of "someday." God's kingdom is today.

Yes, I know it's tough. We are saint and sinner all at once. That's reality too. But the reality is not "***I will someday be a saint*** but today I'm just a lowly sinner." The reality is that you are a saint today. Jesus has forgiven you sins—effective immediately, not at the judgment on the Last Day, not at some point in the future as you are breathing your last breath. You are forgiven and perfect in the eyes of God right now, today as you stand boldly before Him, coming to Him in prayer and offering your praise.

Don't fall into the mindset that the resurrection is this far away thing and then all will be glorious and I shall then stand in the kingdom of God. Yes that's kind of sort of true in that we're yet stuck in this fallen and sinful world. But the present truth is that we are free from sin in Christ and already stand in the eternal kingdom. Believe it and live it.

If I make a habit of denying the reality of my gall bladder, eventually it will drop off my radar, I'll be comfortable in my bad diet, I'll be eating lunch at the House of Lard everyday, and I'll be in a world of trouble. If you believe only that you're a poor miserable sinner and deny your present reality of sainthood, how soon is it going to be before you're simply comfortable in your sin, not really concerned with the kingdom now or in the future?

God is the God of the living. All live to Him. Not just those living in the afterlife, but those living in the mortal life, the here and the now. You are God's. You are His saints. You are not slaves to sin and you are not comfortable in sin. Think of yourself not as "nobody perfect." Remember that in the only way that matters, in the eyes of God, you are forgiven and perfect. Through the blood of Christ you stand guiltless. This is you in Christ. Believe it and strive to let this reality be the guiding force in your life today, because it is indeed the guiding force in your life eternal.

I close with these words of Paul, who was writing to saints, believers perfect in the eyes of God, "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word." Amen.